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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 000976

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [KWBG](#) [IR](#) [IS](#)  
SUBJECT: MINISTER OF STRATEGIC AFFAIRS MOSHE YA'ALON  
REF: TEL AVIV 000617

Classified By: Political Counselor Marc J. Sievers for reasons 1.4 (b),  
(d).

11. (C) SUMMARY. Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu named Lt. Gen. (res.) Moshe (Boogie) Ya'alón to serve as Minister of Strategic Affairs. Ya'alón, whom pundits predicted would serve as Defense Minister before Labor joined the governing coalition, brings to Netanyahu's cabinet extensive military experience. Ya'alón has served as chief of Military Intelligence and later as Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), and occasionally clashed with his superiors over defense strategies. Ya'alón is a political newcomer, but his security credentials and public stature earned him a ministerial portfolio. In his new role, Ya'alón will focus on coordination security, intelligence, and diplomatic initiatives involving Iran and other strategic threats. Ya'alón is known to have center-right views on Iran, advocating tough diplomatic measures and declaring that Israel maintains the option to use force to halt Iran's nuclear program. Ya'alón also maintains hardline views on the Middle East peace process, preferring a "bottom up" approach to reforming Palestinian society and improving Palestinian livelihood instead of focusing on final status negotiations. End Summary.

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EXTENSIVE MILITARY EXPERIENCE, POLITICAL NOVICE  
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12. (C) Ya'alón's extensive military career helps him bring considerable security heft to his position as Strategic Affairs Minister. Ya'alón enlisted in the IDF in 1968, first serving in an airborne regiment, then serving in the elite Sayeret Matkal unit, which he would later command. He became director of Military Intelligence in 1995, and in 1998 was appointed head of IDF's Central Command, the senior IDF officer in charge of the West Bank. In September 2000, on the eve of the Second Intifada, Ya'alón was named IDF Deputy Chief of Staff. He became Chief of Staff in 2002 and concluded his military service in June 2005. Ya'alón was an outspoken military leader, clashing with then Foreign Minister Shimon Peres in the mid-1990s over the credibility of Palestinian leader Yassir Arafat, and running afoul of then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz in 2005 over Ya'alón's objections to Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank.

13. (SBU) Ya'alón had no previous political experience before running for the Likud list ahead of the February 2009 parliamentary elections, having worked since his retirement as a military fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, and then as a senior fellow at the Shalem Center in Jerusalem. Nonetheless, Netanyahu highlighted Ya'alón as one of Likud's new stars during the campaign, calculating that his military experience would appeal to voters concerned about regional threats. Netanyahu had hinted that Ya'alón would be a front-runner for the Defense Ministry post, but Labor's late addition to the coalition meant that Labor party

chief Ehud Barak would remain in that position. Ya'alon instead earned the title of Minister for Strategic Affairs, which apparently entails coordinating security, intelligence and diplomatic initiatives regarding Iran and other strategic threats. Israeli press reported that Ya'alon's close associates say he is satisfied with his new position because it gives him an opportunity to work behind the scenes on important security issues while gaining political experience in a relatively low-profile position.

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HARDLINE VIEWS ON IRAN AND THE PALESTINIANS  
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14. (C) Ya'alon's advocates a hardline position on Iran that mostly conforms to the center-right in Israeli politics. He argues that Iran feels that it is ascendant in the region and that firm measures must be taken soon to reverse that trend. He advocates a three-pronged approach of international isolation of Iran, a strong sanctions regime, and a credible threat of military force to get Tehran to halt its nuclear enrichment program. Ya'alon prefers that Western powers lead the charge, but states that Israel has the will and capability to go it alone, if necessary.

15. (C) Ya'alon's views on the peace process with the Palestinians evince pessimism over Palestinian willingness and ability to reach an agreement that will ensure Israeli security as a Jewish state. He is a strong advocate of replacing what he calls "top down" final status talks with a "bottom up" strategy geared toward improving economic conditions for Palestinians while providing time for

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Palestinian security, legal, and civil institutions to develop. Such a strategy would be followed later - perhaps after a great lapse of time, he says - by peace. Despite these hardline views, Ya'alon suggests that Israel can do away with some obstacles to movement in the West Bank to facilitate commerce, and he has acknowledged improvements in Palestinian security performance. In the end, however, he believes that the establishment of a stable Palestinian society that accepts Israel as a Jewish state ought to be seen as an indispensable condition for any significant diplomatic progress.

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